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See story on page 6

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QUOTE OF NOTE:

“They aren’t just buying a card, they are supporting a local, women-owned business.” - *Jean Dunning*

See story page 13

ON THE COVER

J. Drusilla Carter is the new director of the Cromwell Belden Public Library.

Photo by Lisa Brisson
See story page 6

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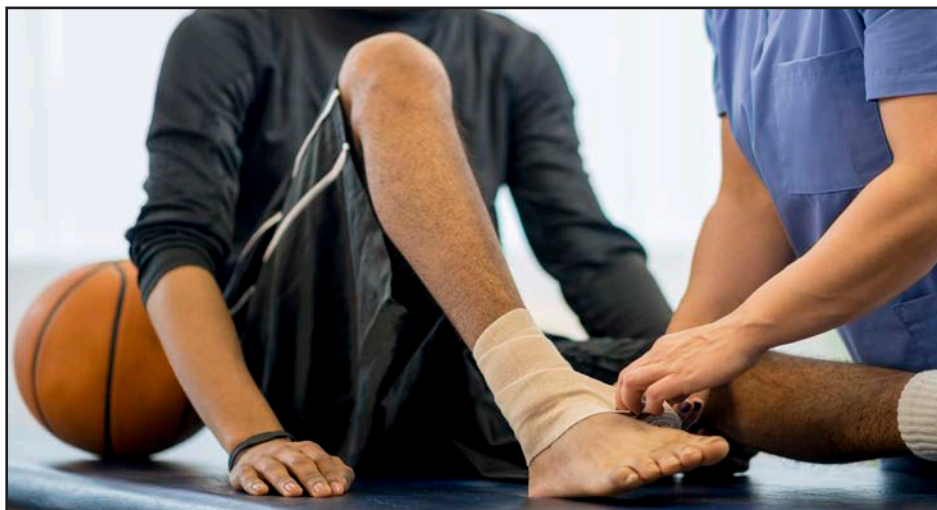
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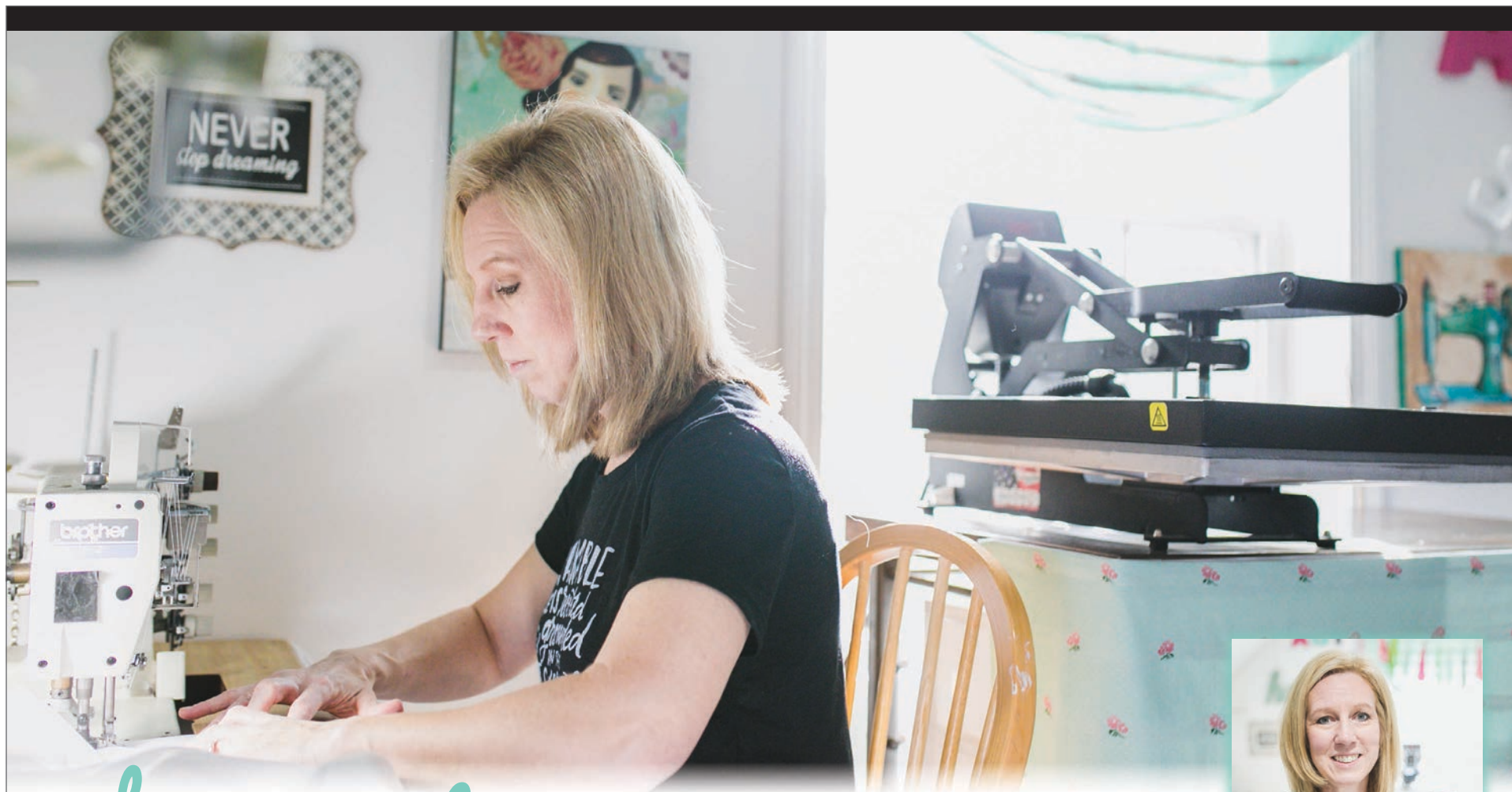


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A stitch in time

Mary Zimmer finds her niche in hand-crafted baby clothes

by Mara Dresner
Staff Writer

Mary Zimmer began sewing when she was just 5 years old. She was working at a bridal shop in alterations when she was 19 and had the realization that she would rather be in business for herself.

"My mother and my grandmother and my sister sewed and I would just sit among them and start creating," Zimmer, who grew up in Michigan and moved to Cromwell seven years ago, said. "They just sewed for a hobby. I've always had an entrepreneurial mind."

Her father gave her \$100 to get started.

"He said, 'Get everything you need to make this happen.' I got all the tools, the thread and the zippers and the needles I could purchase for \$100. I remember going over and I put in about \$20 of my own," she said.

"I have not been employed besides self-employed since I was 19 years old. I'd rather make the money for myself."

Zimmer quickly moved beyond

alterations, making bridesmaid dresses.

"I found out really young that I really preferred to make things rather than fix things," she said. "I married very young. I married a soldier and we had very little income and two children."

She would find work sewing dresses and other items for families on each base. She also found a niche making dance costumes.

"I really enjoyed making dance costumes. It was the best money for 15 years. I made thousands of dance costumes in my home," she said, even hiring others to assist.

"I really overdid it. I was sewing, embroidering, raising kids, and in the middle of all that, I started a graphics business."

It was a combination of that company and her personal life that inspired her latest creative venture, personalized baby clothes and blankets.

"I just started a baby clothing company three years ago when I became a grandma. It's really easy, beautifully easy after all that hard

work," Zimmer said.

The grandmother of soon to be four originally began thinking about the concept while at a trade show a decade ago.

"I had seen the idea of dye sublimation and I had hated it. I thought it was so tacky. It's a process of permanently dying fabric, so there's no fading. The way they were using the process was so tacky. I went back to that tacky idea and made it nice," she said.

"It's always trial and error. I spent a year and a half making things and sending to anyone I knew with a baby. I love to gift things and ask for feedback. I just kept perfecting it until I really liked what I was doing and then I built a website and went on Etsy."

The items A Great Baby sells are personalized with both patterns and the baby's name. Every item is made to order.

"We make personalized baby blankets and products with luxurious quality that would not fade or be damaged in the wash," Zimmer said.

"We started with leggings and

Mary Zimmer makes custom baby clothes for her company A Great Baby in the studio on the second floor of her Cromwell home.



Courtesy photos

people started saying, 'Can you put this on a blanket?' And I thought, that sounds really hard. I thought I was going to have to price this to make it worth it. When the orders really began, it surprised me."

She spends time on Pinterest and Instagram searching for trends.

"I study my market and my daughters are my market because they're young moms. I've always followed fashion and cared about fashion and ideas and trends," she said.

She will often post a new design on Instagram and, if it gets good feedback, have it photographed and added to her website. Patterns run the gamut, designed to appeal to a variety of hobbies and tastes, such as cameras, roses, deer antlers and construction tools.

"Since her launch, I've bought gifts for a half a dozen friends. All of my children have articles of clothing as well as blankets," Jayne Monroe, who lives in Michigan and is the mother of four children under the age of 2, including infant triplets, said.

"It is my standard go-to gift now.

I'm at the age where all of my friends [are having babies]. I go to a baby shower once a month. Everybody knows they're getting a gift from A Great Baby."

While Monroe likes the clothing, the baby blankets are a favorite item.

"She makes swaddle blankets for me. I love the outfits, but they grow out of it; it just becomes a memento piece," said Monroe, who noted her 2-year-old daughter still uses her blanket.

"The quality is the number-one thing for me. Most baby products these days are not made very well; they don't hold up. All my kids have reflux. Everything I have gets washed once a day," Monroe said.

"Her products have been washed dozens and dozens of times. The color never fades, there's no pilling. She buys the best material out there and it shows. There's no wear and tear."

Making baby clothes isn't Zimmer's only creative business. She also runs a Christian printing company called A Great Impression that makes wall decals. That is also a home business, although not her home.

"My daughters work for me and

they make them in their homes and they send them," she said. "My true, true passion is to help other women have the joy of creating and making extra money that helps their family."

She originally started that business when she was doing screen printing and needed a vinyl cutter to put names on the back of baseball jerseys. That's when she discovered this way to put words on a wall without painting them on.

"Christian words mean the world to me. That's at the root of who I am. I was horrible at first, then I got better and churches started hiring us," she said.

Clients are churches that might want a mission statement printed and individuals, although not all local.

"It's not something that's popular in Connecticut. It's popular in the South, in the Bible Belt, even in California, just not in the East. It's not something I see people do here," Zimmer said.

The business has special meaning and connection for her.

"I just always was raised to love Jesus and was always interested in



Mary Zimmer's designs feature graphics and each baby's name. Every item is custom made.

him. When I was 18, I heard I could have a personal relationship with him and I said, 'OK, sign me up; what do I do?' Ever since then I just live in the Christian faith," she said.

"Basically every move I've ever made has been based on prayer and him guiding me, and by him I mean God. The Christian wall company ended up turning into a ministry. I end up praying with customers on the phone or sending them free stuff. It's really become a ministry as well as a job," Zimmer said.

She's eyeing some possibilities for expanding her reach with the baby

business, although she wants to be sure to retain the personal touch that she offers with each package she sends, which includes a handwritten note.

"I literally say a prayer for each baby by name," she said.

Feedback from happy parents and grandparents makes her day.

"They say money can't buy happiness, but they aren't opening this box right now. That brings me so much joy, getting these reports back from these moms and grandmas." **CL**

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New at the helm

J. Drusilla Carter settles in as new director of the Cromwell Belden Public Library

by Mark Jahne
Editor

J. Drusilla Carter loves people and she loves books, too. She is delighted to be in town as the new director of the Cromwell Belden Public Library.

Carter has been on the job since Jan. 6. Her most recent job was director of the Willimantic Public Library. Other prior directorships include the Chesterfield County Public Library in South Carolina and Blue Ridge Regional Library in Virginia.

She replaces Eileen



Photo by Lisa Brisson

Branciforte, who retired this past year after a more than 30-year career as head of the town's library.

Carter is accustomed to moving around. Her biological parents, as well as her stepparents, all served in the U.S. Army. When they moved, she moved with them. She also learned the value of hard work and discipline.

"Mom, Dad and Bev were all drill

sergeants," she said.

Connecticut was not foreign to her. She attended high school at the private, all-girls Ethel Walker School in Simsbury.

She studied for her undergraduate degree at the University of Chicago and Salem College. Her graduate work was done at the University of South Carolina. Carter

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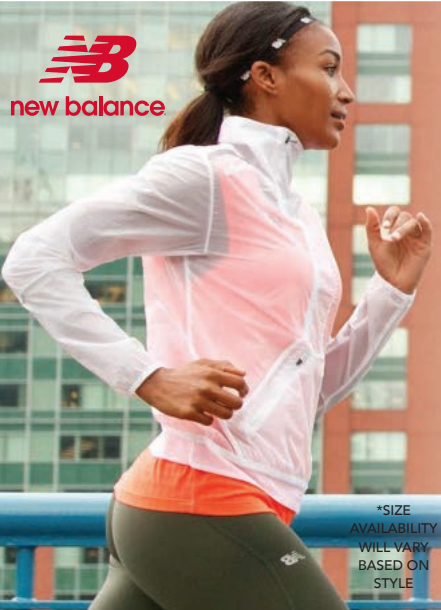


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earned master's degrees in library science and public history.

Her job in Willimantic included much more than the work of a typical library manager. It also contained a social services piece because homeless people and people in need of mental health care often found comfort and safety at the library.

"It's a very different clientele here," she said.

Carter wasn't actively looking for a new job but a friend who lives in town told her about the opening and encouraged her to apply. It sounded appealing so she decided to give it a shot.

"A college friend of mine [Amanda Drew] is on the Board of Finance here," she said.

"I knew it was a good community and had heard good things about the library. I was ready for a change," she said. "The assistant director, Lois [Meltzer], has been phenomenal. She had everything ready for me."

Carter called both her staff and the library's patrons wonderful. She looks forward to relocating the

director's office from the rear corner of the library to somewhere in the center of the action so that she can interact more with both groups.

In the planning stages is a monthly "Tea with the Library Director" opportunity for people to chat with her over refreshments. Carter welcomes input and feedback from the community.

The Manchester resident also appreciates the backing the library enjoys from local government. Her position reports directly to the town manager.

"The Town Council is very supportive in terms of funding," she said.

Carter knows that fiscal times are tough so she is looking for ways to stretch her resources. The library is part of a larger consortium and also enjoys the benefit of an active Friends group.

She serves on the legislative committee of the Connecticut Library Association.

She is reviewing current programs and services with an eye on determining what more can be

offered to the citizens of Cromwell. Already on the list are doing more to attract teenagers and young adults to the library.

Then there are the physical needs of the facility. Town officials would like to create additional space and she's in favor of that.

"We're looking at doing a full renovation of the building," Carter said.

It's not the size of the current building that is the problem; it's the layout. She said the way the library was constructed is not conducive to modern technology.

"This building was built in the 1980s. Nobody was using high-speed Internet in the '80s," she said. "The way this library was designed, we're locked into a certain layout."

One possibility is to expand it into what is now a courtyard between the library and town hall gymnasium. Carter said this would provide better program space.

The expansion, if approved, would allow for greater flexibility, more children's programming, a teen room, and the opportunity for great-

er collaboration with the neighboring senior center and the public schools.

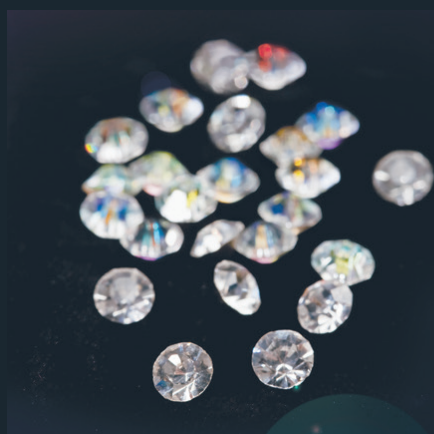
Carter is not the only new staff member and she wants to capitalize on the strengths of those who have joined the library's personnel, a total of 16 positions, some full time and others part time. She's also busy evaluating the collections and weeding out multiple copies of the same book to make room for a more diverse selection.

Mary Payne, president of the Friends of the Cromwell Belden Public Library, said her group is pleased with what they have seen thus far in Carter's brief time on the job. The new director has already cleared shelf and file cabinet space for the Friends to use.

"The Friends are enjoying the new director," she said.

Payne said members have commented positively on Carter's support, sense of humor and commitment to their group. The Friends are preparing for their first tea social to be held at 6:30 p.m. April 19 at the library. **CL**

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Jasper

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Ivy

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other dogs could create a problem for this gentle old gal. She likes to relax and hopes to find a family with prior general dog experience.



Ivy

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spotlight

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Rocky Hill Library 5K Run/Walk

April 8, 9 a.m.

Griswold Middle School
144 Bailey Road

runsignup.com/Race/Events/CT/RockyHill/BookItForCora

Runners and walkers are invited to participate in this second annual event. The race starts at Griswold Middle School shortly followed by a kids' fun run. Registration is now open, tickets are \$25 for adults and \$10 for children. All proceeds will benefit library programming and summer reading activities.

Friends Tea Social

April 19, 6:30 p.m.

Cromwell Belden Public Library
39 West St., Cromwell

The Friends of the Cromwell Belden Public Library will host this event and Peggi Camosci from Tea Roses Tea Room has donated the tea to be served. It will be accompanied by soft background music and light refreshments. There will also be drawings and a tea cup auction. The auction will have cups available for purchase starting at \$1 and tea pots for \$5. Tickets are \$1 each or seven for \$5. Another feature is a selection of gift baskets.

Cromwell government agencies, schools, businesses, clubs, churches and all other civic organizations are invited to send us their upcoming events for inclusion in events spotlight and/or the community calendar. We also welcome people notes and news briefs for news roundup. You can send them to us at mjahne@turleyct.com or Cromwell LIFE, 540 Hopmeadow St., Simsbury, CT 06070.

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Change in leadership

Chris Rusack named director of recreation and youth services

by Mark Jahne
Editor

There's a new face in the town Department of Recreation and Youth Services office on the ground floor of town hall. Chris Rusack is the recently hired director, succeeding Susan Schein, who retired a few months ago after more than 30 years of service.

Rusack, 45, lives in Manchester. He previously served as one of the supervisors with the Rocky Hill Parks and Recreation Department and was familiar with Cromwell and its recreational options.

"Cromwell is a great community, very similar to Rocky Hill. I saw an opportunity to make the community better by offering more recreation programs and services," he said.

The move came after spending 12 years in Rocky Hill.

Rusack earned a B.A. degree in marketing and communications from Central Connecticut State University. He began his recreational career as a basketball coach and a volunteer with the Greater Hartford YMCA's branch in West Hartford. From there, he went to Rocky Hill.

"I started out in the corporate world, but I felt something was missing," he said.

A career counselor advised him to give recreation a try. He quickly realized that he could thrive in such a creative environment.

"I fell in love with the career," he said. "We're dealing with young children, kindergarten age, all the way

up to adults. No two days are the same."

Since coming aboard, Rusack has launched a new logo and look for the department's brochure, as well as a Facebook site. The program brochure will soon be available online, as will registration. The next brochure comes out in March and will include information about summer programming.

"Our website is a big tool for us," he said. "It's a cultural difference here because people aren't used to having these tools."

It will also feature eblasts and updated content. Another move was



Photo by Mark Jahne

Chris Rusack is Cromwell's new director of recreation and youth services.



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“It’s an exciting time because there’s so much potential here.”

—Chris Rusack

to formalize the process by which residents can rent space at pavilions in three town parks: Watrous, Pierson and Riverport.

“The Town Council just approved a new field and facility policy,” Rusack said. “We’re also trying to revamp our concert venue, bringing a better diversity of music.”

Another goal is to do more to serve children with special needs.

“I’ve always wanted to run a department. It’s an exciting time because there’s so much potential here,” he said.

Rusack reports to Town Manager Anthony Salvatore, who is pleased with the new director’s performance thus far. “We had some really good can-

didates. Chris came out ahead of them because of his previous experience in Rocky Hill,” Salvatore said. “I was looking for somebody to come in and do an assessment of our department and make changes as necessary.”

He added that Rusack performed well during the interview process. Salvatore said he supports his new department head in the desire to offer new programs to the residents of Cromwell.

Rusack, in turn, said he appreciates the town manager’s support.

The department offers programs for adults, families, youths, special needs, kindergarten and pre-kindergarten populations. There are also youth services activities.

Toddler Play, Kindergarten Gym Time and Krafts with Kim are designed for ages 4-5. Youth programs include Magic and Juggling Workshops, Mad Science, Let’s Gogh Art and a Kids Healthy Tasty Cooking Course for ages 8-12.

Families can enjoy open gym time at the middle school, pavilion picnic reservations in the three aforementioned parks, or a trip to see the Hartford Wolf Pack play on March 5.

Adult options include basketball for ages 18-30, co-ed volleyball, open gym walking and yoga. Pickleball is available to all ages and Camp Sunrise is a five-town collaborative summer program for children with special needs from ages 3 to 21.

Youth service options are Kin Care, Internet Safety Concepts, Baby-sitter Safety Training, a parent/child summer basket weaving class, a parent/toddler interaction playgroup and the opportunity for boys and girls to learn how to crochet and knit. **CL**

To learn more about Cromwell Recreation & Youth Services call 860-632-3467 or see cromwellct.com/recreation.

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ONE AT A TIME

Cromwell women create handmade cards

by Mara Dresner
Staff Writer

If one looks at the backgrounds of Jean Dunning and Karen Gumkowski, there is little to suggest that they would end up creating handmade greeting cards.

Dunning has a bachelor's degree in clothing and textile design. She worked in computer systems for the apparel industry and had a part-time business called The Silly Goose, designing and selling children's clothing.

Gumkowski graduated from the Illinois Institute of Technology and worked as a fire protection and safety engineer before stepping away to raise a family.

The two women, who have known each other since 2001, met through their children, volunteering together for the Boy Scouts, before co-chairing Project Safe Graduation for Cromwell High School.

"We raised a lot of money together. We felt like we worked really well together," Dunning said.

They each had a love of art. "My mother is an artist, so I had grown up with art," Gumkowski said.

"Both of us always had an interest in creating things. I worked in fabric, Karen worked in wood," Dunning added. "We liked creating things, we liked art. My father had a strong love of art and had taken me to art museums."

The pair would often make hand-crafted invitations for various parties.

"When we sent invitations, people would say, 'You could sell these.' The turning point was we were looking for some kind of job.



Photos by Mara Dresner

JK Designs' cards feature a number of techniques, such as use of these stamps (above). Left: This JK Designs' birthday card features a background watercolor from Helga Menke, embellished with the word "birthday" and the butterfly.

The kids were getting older. It was just the next thing."

The two went to SCORE for assistance in launching a business and formed JK Designs in 2004.

"When we started, our goal was to help people connect through greeting cards. I think people are even less connected now than when we first started. People need to connect, to write personal cards," Gumkowski said.

"We feel even more strongly that people are living in a digital world and we want people to connect personally, by sitting down and writing a little card."



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Photo by Mara Dresner



Courtesy photo



Above, left: Jean Dunning, left, and Karen Gumkowski create handmade greeting cards in the basement of Gumkowski's Cromwell home; Above, right: Jean Dunning, one of the owners of JK Designs, uses knitting needles and then transfers the knitting to the toothpicks for this card's design.

The cards are available at a number of local retailers such as Tea Roses Tea Room in Cromwell, the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum Shop in Hartford, Heart of the Country in Old Wethersfield, and Emmy Lou's Ltd. in Glastonbury. They also have corporate accounts.

"I'm so thrilled JK Designs is locally right here in Cromwell. The cards are creative, quality and reasonable priced. Tea Roses loves to share in their vision of saving our U.S. Postal Service one card at a time. Of course, being a women-owned company is close to my heart," Peggi Camosci of Tea Roses Tea Room said.

Dunning and Gumkowski design the cards together, usually starting with an occasion such as birthday, sympathy or baby. They reassess their line twice a year, in the spring and fall.

"We start with the occasion and work up from there. Sometimes we see something we like and make it our own. As the year progresses we're always seeing things, whether it's at the stationery show and we're seeing that owls are really big or the latest color, or the trend for this fall or Pantone came out with this green," Gumkowski said.

"We work up from there. I can't say either of us comes up with that idea. We bounce back with each other on the process."

"It's rare that there's a card that only one person did it. We start with a theme and then we both work on it together," Dunning said.

They work out of the basement in Gumkowski's house where they have an extensive array of supplies

including inks and stamps. There are about 100 designs available at any time.

The business is a family affair. Gumkowski's mother, Helga Menke, paints some of the backgrounds for the cards. The company's logo was created by Dunning's husband Sam and features a car with envelopes

All of their cards are multidimensional and might feature ribbon, twine or even hand-knit items.

"We've had people say, 'Why don't you just scan them and print them and sell them?' It wouldn't be the same. People are looking for these layers. It's not just a picture of knitting, it's actual knitting,"



"They aren't just buying a card, they are supporting a local, women-owned business."

—Jean Dunning

flying out of it.

They've learned a lot over the past several years. Gumkowski, who said she is mostly self-taught on the computer, noted that they take classes once or twice a year from craft professionals.

"To see what new techniques are out there, to see what new products that we can take into our line and make them look fresh, different paper or different inks," she said.

"We have many different inks and all have different properties, which creates a different background for our cards. You have to know how to use them the way they were designed. When we first started out, we thought ink was ink. We learned quite differently."

Dunning said.

They print on environmentally friendly paper.

"We spent a lot of time researching the paper," Dunning said. "It's been a good selling point for us."

While their focus is cards, they have branched out a little to make notecards from original paintings of Menke's, as well as items such as gift tags and save-the-date cards.

Despite working together on creating the cards, they have found their own lanes when it comes to the day-to-day running of the business.

"We use everything we have in our skills sets. Karen's really precise making things line up and seeing proportions. She has a good sense of spatial relations and proportion,"

Dunning said. "I can do random and I'm good at putting colors together."

Gumkowski does most of the computer work.

"Jean does all the phone work. I don't like making phone calls. Most of the time Jean will be making phone calls," she said.

"I'm the production manager and Jean is the sales manager. That's the way my husband refers to us. I'll make sure it gets done on time and Jean says we can do it."

The prices are determined by each store; the cards usually sell for \$5 to \$6 each. They estimate that each season approximately 15 to 20 percent of their line are new designs. The number of cards in the line fluctuates.

Each card has a name and is sold in a cellophane bag that includes information about the company, including "JK Designs, two enterprising women committed to saving the U.S. Postal System, one card at a time. Each card is carefully made in the USA with an effort to conserve paper and limit the use of natural resources."

"We were brainstorming and discussing how, if people stopped sending cards, we wouldn't need a post office and it led to this mini bio. We are aiming at a particular consumer, one who cares about where it's made, by whom, with what kind of paper, etc., and the fact that it's local to Connecticut," Dunning said.

"This way, they aren't just buying a card, they are supporting a local, women-owned business."

They enjoy hearing from customers who save the cards; some even frame them.

"I hope it makes a connection with a piece of art, rather than just a card. It's more than a card; sometimes it's a gift. Times are tough and if you can't afford an expensive gift, now you can have a gift that's a card," Gumkowski said.

The friends approach each card as if it's the only one they are making.

"We pay attention to detail on every card. When I'm putting the cards together, I always think that the person who's getting a card is only getting this card, they're only getting this one card," Dunning said.

"I try to make each one perfect. It might be the only card of ours they'll ever see." **CL**

Learn more at cardsbyjkdesigns.com.

LIFE

in the classroom

Cromwell High School presents the musical 'Rock of Ages'

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer



Photos courtesy of Ray Sinclair

The auditorium at Cromwell High School was transformed from a traditional school stage into a rock 'n' roll theater the week-end of March 9-12 for the drama club's production of "Rock of Ages."

The show, which ran on Broadway for more than 2,300

performances, is a jukebox musical that uses hit songs from the 1980s to tell the story of aspiring rocker Drew and small-town girl Sherrie. They work with the rest of the cast to save the fabled L.A. Strip from being overtaken by German developers.

"It's kind of like 'Mamma Mia' in that the plot was built around the

songs," said senior O'Kara Kramer, 17, who played Sherrie.

"Rock of Ages," which was also made into a movie in 2012, features the songs of Twisted Sister, Styx, Pat Benatar, Whitesnake and REO Speedwagon, among others.

"They're these '80s classics, so they're all just great songs," said junior

Ryan Adams, who played Drew.

Many of the songs are well-known tunes but, because they were released before the cast members were born, for some students the music was completely new. According to the two leads, however, knowing the songs beforehand made preparing for the show even

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Ranon Klein played Lonny and rocked out to the music.

more difficult.

“The music was surprisingly difficult to do,” O’Kara said. “You can’t sing it the way that you know it, so you pretty much have to relearn it.”

“I knew all the songs and the kids knew some of the songs,” Director Ray Sinclair said. “The focus became how do you save your voice? How do you sing this correctly? A lot of times it was relearning to sing the harmonies.”

“Rock of Ages” marks Sinclair’s

first turn as a director, but he has been immersed in theater for years. In addition to this job, he also runs the band programs at the high school and is the K-12 music supervisor for the district.

In recent years, he worked with former drama club director Roslyn Greenberg to assist with the shows.

One of the most difficult aspects of the show was balancing all that he does. Sinclair ran rehearsals for at least three days a week since December, adding two more rehearsals per week as the show grew closer, all while maintaining his job in the district, being a full-time graduate student, and spending time with his wife and two children.

“It’s a lot,” he said with a small smile.

Reflecting upon his first experience as director, he was excited to amp up the production.

“Last year my predecessor did ‘Beauty and the Beast’ so I wanted to do something completely different,” he said.

Looking through the different shows available, Sinclair also wanted

to find something that would showcase the pool of talented students in the school.

“I thought it matched our cast perfectly,” he said. “I really thought this show could feature the right people.”

In addition to a new director, the show also brought in new choreographer Bryan Destin. With so much change, Sinclair said that initially the cast was hesitant to invest themselves in the show.

“This was his first show as the director, so it kind of felt like a test on how it would go,” O’Kara said. “It was a first for a lot of us.”

“In the initial stages it was a little difficult,” Sinclair said, “but shortly into rehearsals it felt like everybody bonded as a family. That was something that became really special.”

He added that students were soon immersing themselves in the cast and the production, spending time together outside of school and growing close as a group.

That closeness became important as the show grew closer because

students had a large part in all aspects of the production. In addition to a student cast, the stage director, crew and music pit were almost entirely students.

“The kids had a great time and did an awesome job putting it on,” Sinclair said. “We really have a great drama program right here in Cromwell.”

According to the students, it was his dedication to the show that helped it to run as smoothly as it did.

“Mr. Sinclair is the most passionate, ambitious person I’ve known in a long time,” Ryan said. “He just looks a task right in the face and gets it done.”

Looking forward, Sinclair is excited and eager to showcase for the community the talented students at Cromwell High School. He plans to do a family friendly musical next year such as “The Wizard of Oz,” “Hairspray” or “Legally Blonde.”

“We’re trying to really bring the arts back to the high school in a big way,” he said. “We hope the community will become even more involved for next year.” **CL**

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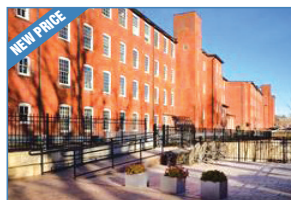
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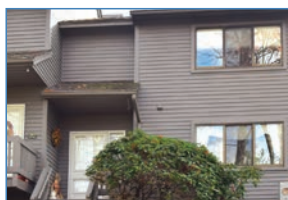
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Courtesy photo

Santina Giuliano's Body Focus Therapeutic Massage is located in a 1911 box car.

Calm aboard the railroad

Antique railroad car is now a place for healing

by **Mara Dresner**
Staff Writer

Many people think of trains as something cold and industrial, but Santina Giuliano has turned an old railroad car into a place of healing. Giuliano recently moved her Body Focus Therapeutic Massage business into the classic train car that sits on Main Street, next to the red caboose.

The box car was originally built in 1911, then refurbished during the Great Depression, according to Glen Johnson, a real estate agent and train buff who owns the cars. He purchased them in the early 1980s.

For well more than a decade, the site served as an ice cream parlor, The Caboose Creamery. His wife ran a gift shop in the depot space called Kit and Caboose.

"I owned the ice cream shop. The reason I stopped was I was

working 18 hours a day. My wife also had the gift shop in the depot itself. I was running the real estate business and some other businesses and it became too much," Johnson said.

"It was seasonal but [on] weekends, that place was packed. I didn't have the energy anymore to do that. I gutted that box car and changed it to professional and everything worked out for the best," he added.

"I was looking for a particular type of professional go in there, as it affects the entire property. It's good for her in particular because it's quiet. There's no interference from above or below, or from either side. She wants that quiet. It's a very nice, quiet professional business for that unique location."

As Johnson knows, it's all about location, location, location.

"[Santina] has one of the most

unique locations in the state. That was one of the reasons I bought that property. I've been in real estate for 43 years. It's a fantastic location finder. People know right where it is," Johnson said.

The box car has been refurbished and is divided into a separate area for the massage services, a bathroom and other space, such as for a desk for Giuliano.

She also has a location in Meriden. She was working out of an office on West Street in town when her boyfriend, Bill Hochsprung Jr., told her about the train car.

"He said, 'I'm not sure what you're going to think about it.' He told me it's an old, retired train, on a retired train track and I just kind of looked at him" she recalled. "All you saw was a big, long room. It was completely bare."

After considering it for a couple of weeks, she got on board with the idea, and Hochsprung designed plans to develop the space. Giuliano opened in the new location this past November.

"It's cool. I don't want people to look at it as weird. You're in an old train car. It's very unique. I brought something old and rustic and cold and turned it into something modern, warm and inviting, a place to do massage therapy to help people feel better," she said.

She loves the new space.

"This is the train car. We're actually on the train tracks. We're on wheels, but we're not going anywhere," Giuliano said. "Parents bring their kids here. I see people taking pictures with their kids."

She's also enjoying being downtown and is a member of the

Cromwell Merchants Association.

"I just feel like I'm more involved with the community now because everyone knows where this train is. I like having a space being some place very historic. I love being here, part of the downtown business merchants. I like being part of that community, being part of this," she said.

Even though she wasn't yet open, she set up a tent to give chair massages for this past year's Halloween on Main event and is looking forward to the CMA's annual car show.

"I'm also an auto enthusiast. I have a Mustang that's like my child," she said.

Giuliano first discovered the healing arts as a teenager while growing up in Middletown.

"As of the age of 16, I started going for massages and chiropractic appointments after soccer practice. It was a gift to myself. I would try to save up my money and it would be my gift to myself. I always thought about taking care of my body," she said.

"I knew within my head that I had to be my own responsible person so I didn't get involved with things that can harm my body. I thought about what can I do to enhance the health of my body?" she added.

"There was a massage therapist at my cousin's hair salon, upstairs in the same building. Every time I would go, I would ask, 'What's that muscle? What are you doing there?'"

That person suggested that she might be interested in pursuing massage therapy as a career.

She attended the Connecticut Center of Massage Therapy in her 20s, while working full time, graduating in 2004 and receiving her license in early 2005.

Giuliano took a bit of a roundabout path to her career as a massage therapist.

She's worked at a wide variety of jobs including at NAPA Auto Parts, as a sales assistant for a television station, as a radio salesperson, and delivering and installing first-aid kits and eye-wash stations.

Even while she was working at other jobs, she would take on several massage clients each week during the evenings and weekends under the name of "Massage Therapy by Santina."

After several life changes, Giuliano decided it was time to take

the plunge to pursuing massage full time in 2012 and opened her first office in Meriden.

"I was finally going to get back to what I went to school for, to not be afraid of jumping in the water. I was always checking the water with my toe. I was always scared for some reason," she said.

She later added the Cromwell location and changed the name of her business to Body Focus Therapeutic Massage.

"Massage Therapy by Santina sounded very singular. It was just me, and it still is just me, but when

**"This location
is working out
really great.
It's super cool
to be in the
train."**

—Santina Giuliano

I'm ready to expand" the name will reflect this, she said.

Because she has worked jobs that are both physical and sedentary, she believes she has a unique perspective.

"I can relate to people's ailments if they're sitting all day. My job at NAPA was very physical. I was a puller. You pull orders, you're loading shelves, you're taking cardboard down to the Dumpster. I started life being physical. I've always been a tomboy," she said.

She had an accident while working at NAPA that she thought might end her massage career before it even started.

"I'd fallen on the second floor metal grating. I tripped and busted open my knee; I hurt both my thumbs. I thought, 'Oh my God, I'm in the last term of massage therapy school.' I thought I was doomed," she said.

"I was a little nervous about if



Photo by Mara Dresner

Santina Giuliano held numerous jobs before deciding to pursue massage therapy as a full-time career.

the thumb problems come back to haunt me. Then I saw an article about Ashiatsu Oriental Bar Therapy. I thought, 'Hmm, I'd be doing massage with my feet. That's awesome. Weird but

awesome.' It would help me not to overuse my hands, my thumbs," Giuliano said.

"I'm glad I took that course. I would say that's my specialty, even though I do traditional Swedish massage, traditional deep tissue, also Thai massage, warm bamboo massage, and cupping is a recent thing I do. I'm fascinated by Ashiatsu Oriental Bar Therapy. There's my answer. If I ever get very arthritic in my thumbs, I'll still be able to meet the needs of my clients."

She also learned a variety of techniques to help protect her hands.

"You learn not to over work your thumbs. You use your forearms, your elbows, your fists. There are lots of tools we like to put in our tool box. Ashiatsu is another tool. You use your body weight. You're working with gravity and you can pull up on the weight to adjust to the client," she said.

She also offers sports massage and hot stone massage.

"At the end of the day, I want to help my clients learn how to listen to their bodies and help them understand that they need to make time for themselves. I want them to lead happier, healthier and more balanced lives," she said.

"It's very rewarding when you get a follow-up phone call from a client that says, 'Santina, thank you so much. I feel great today.' That is job satisfaction."

She's thrilled with her Main Street office.

"I love being in a room where there's nobody around me. The energy is very pure. There's no distractions with my clients and I can focus on them. That's my main goal, to help people feel better, to get better and just be mindful of what they should do for themselves because life is so busy that we forget about the most important person," Giuliano said.

"You should take care of yourself mind, body and spirit, before being able to give the right energy and help to someone else," she added. "This location is working out really great. It's super cool to be in the train. It's a nice feeling being in such a classic train car." **CL**

Learn more at bodyfocusct.com.

News roundup

Alumni reunion schedule

Did you attend, teach or work at a Cromwell school? The Cromwell Alumni Committee is holding a reunion June 17, an opportunity to see classmates as well as teachers and other friends from your days in the Cromwell Public Schools.

People whose families left town before graduation are invited, as well as classmates who went to Mercy, Xavier or Vinal Tech. This is the fourth time the committee has hosted a reunion.

In 2006, 25 classes met at a resort in Moodus. In 2009, 30 classes celebrated the 50th anniversary of the first graduating class from Cromwell High School at an event held at Watrous Park. In 2013, 30-plus classes met again at Watrous Park.

This year the reunion will take place at Pierson Park, known to many of the early classes as Community Field. The committee has reserved the pavilion near the football field and will have a large tent with tables.

Food will be provided by Taíno's Smokehouse. Admission is \$45 and covers the cost of food and other items such as the tent, insurance and fees.

The committee is seeking representatives to contact their classmates. The classes from the late 1980s and 1990s are passing their 25-year mark and it's hoped more of them will attend. See cromwellalumni.com/reunion2017 for more information and to sign up.

Pilgrim Manor supports CCMC

1. Made with tender loving care and blessed by the chaplain, residents at Pilgrim Manor Care Center gave the gift of warmth to children who are patients at Connecticut Children's Medical Center in Hartford. Pilgrim Manor is the skilled nursing center at Covenant Village of Cromwell, a faith-based, not-for-profit continuing care retirement community.

A group of residents assembled several knotted fleece blankets in colors of green, pink, gray and yellow. After rolling the blankets and



Courtesy photos

tying them with a bow, they prayed over them with the Rev. Richard Cudmore, Covenant Village of Cromwell's chaplain.

Residents Ann DeFelice and Margaret Carlson delivered the blankets to CCMC staff, who gave them to the children. The blankets are made of two pieces of fleece, each lined up on top of the other. Cuts are made around the edges and those cuts were then trimmed and tied together.

Ädelbrook receives grant

Ädelbrook recently received a \$10,000 grant from the Thomas J. Atkins Memorial Trust Fund. This grant will provide high-quality and high-durability communications tools for youth with autism spectrum disorder who are served by the school.

Electronic devices such as iPads are known to help educate and improve communication for individuals on the spectrum, some of whom may be nonverbal. These tools fit into Ädelbrook's total communication plan, which is the use of alternative and augmentative communication, sign language and verbal production.

Research has shown that total communication is successful in teaching both receptive and expressive language for people who struggle to communicate. A key component of this grant is making sure that not only the staff are trained to use the equipment, but that parents are also

able to use it so they can transfer the skills from school to home.

Golf sponsors needed

Ädelbrook's Golf for Kids Tournament will be held June 1 at the Robert Trent Jones Course at Lyman Orchards Golf Club in Middlefield. Now in its 22nd year, this tournament promises a field of more than 120 golfers and an opportunity for companies to get their names out in the forefront.

The day includes 18 holes of golf, continental breakfast and afternoon buffet, contests for long drive and closest to the pin, free neck and shoulder massages, a silent auction and prize drawing, as well as other special contests throughout the tournament.

Sponsorship levels range from \$150 to \$3,500. This money will benefit the many children and young adults who are served by Ädelbrook. For further information call 860-635-6010 ext. 327 or email Sharon Graves at sgraves@adelbrook.org.

Foundations help fund work study

Grants from private foundations allow Ädelbrook to offer high-quality work study opportunities for the students in The Learning Centers in Cromwell and East Hartford, as well as two transitional academies in Middletown.

The most recent funding for its

work study programming comes from the Liberty Bank Foundation, Covenant Children's Ministries, Peoples United Community Foundation and the George A. & Grace L. Long Foundation, Bank of America, N.A., co-trustee.

Join the hospice team

Masonicare is seeking volunteers to join its hospice team in Cromwell, Newington, Rocky Hill and Wethersfield. Their role is to visit with patients and their families during the day or on weekends. Flexible schedules are offered.

Full training on hospice end-of-life care and ongoing training will be provided. Military veterans are encouraged to join the We Honor Veterans program. Anyone who is interested in becoming a hospice volunteer, or learning more, may call 860-528-5195 or email czukowski@masonicare.org.

Cigarette thief escapes

The Cromwell Police Department responded to Alltown Mobil on Berlin Road at 4:42 a.m. March 7 for a report of a theft of cigarettes. Upon arrival, officers discovered that an employee attempted to stop the suspect by chasing him into the parking lot.

The employee was able to get the driver's side door of the suspect's vehicle open and attempted to stop him from driving away. While physically attached to the suspect, the employee



was dragged backwards by the vehicle and then forward across the parking lot for approximately 50 feet.

The employee was evaluated by medical personnel but did not require further treatment. The suspect is described as a heavy-set white male approximately 5'8" to 5'10" in his mid 30s and the vehicle is a blue Honda Fit. Anyone with information is asked to contact the police at 860-635-2256.

Ädelbrook thanks fire, police

2. Members of the Ädelbrook staff thanked the first responders who rescued a 15-year-old student from the ice-covered pond in front of its facility on Hicksville Road. Cromwell police and fire personnel, including both department chiefs, who responded that day met at Cromwell Fire Department headquarters on Court Street March 3 to enjoy a luncheon pro-

vided by the school.

Firefighter Jeremy Hiriak, who had donned the Mustang cold water rescue suit to save the child, was on hand to personally receive the school's gratitude.

He is shown with Heide Parhem, Ädelbrook director of marketing and communications.

Man robs bank

The Cromwell Police Department responded to People's United Bank located inside Stop-n-Shop at 195 West St. on March 17 at approximately 11:15 a.m. for a bank robbery committed by a lone white male. The suspect presented a teller with a note demanding money. No one was injured in the robbery and an undetermined amount of money was taken. Anyone with information is urged to contact the police department at 860-635-2256.

Audition for community play

The Cromwell Community Theater will present "Fiddler on the Roof" from August 11-13 at Cromwell High School. Auditions will be held May 12-13 at Company 'n Tempo, 211 Shunpike Road #8. Anyone age 8 and older is welcome to try out.

Performers do not need to be Cromwell residents to be a part of the production. Anyone interested in auditioning or volunteering for various aspects of the show is invited to visit cromwellcommunitytheater.com for more details or email cromwellcommunitytheater@yahoo.com. **CL**

People notes

Ilyszha Agasino, Kellyanne Cahill, Olivia Dworak, Abigail Malczon, Suzanne O'Hara, Julia Pitruzzello, Catryn Rhoden, Celia Ryan, Ava Stearns, Jocelyn Stearns, Taylor Winkler earned high honors at Mercy High School. **Juliana Claudio, Lindsey Fritz, Caitlin Malczon, Olivia Melillo, Allison Vess and Cecilia Vess** earned first honors. **Janina Timbro and Shenyang "Samantha" Zhang** earned second honors. **CL**

Cromwell government agencies, schools, businesses, clubs, churches and all other civic organizations are invited to send us their upcoming events for inclusion in events spotlight and/or the community calendar. We also welcome people notes and news briefs for news roundup. You can send them to us at mjahne@turleyct.com or Cromwell LIFE, 540 Hopmeadow St., Simsbury, CT 06070.

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Students of the month

Pair takes stage in CHS musical production

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

O'Kara Kramer and Ryan Adams know how to rock. The two students at Cromwell High School recently wrapped up their lead roles as Sherrie and Drew in the school's musical production of "Rock of Ages."

"It's about a guy who's from Detroit who goes out to Los Angeles in pursuit of his rock and roll dream," 16-year-old Ryan said. "He meets Sherrie and they go through a bunch of different problems. Drew gets signed to a record deal, but it's not at all how he wanted it."

The two actors had extremely different experiences coming into the show. While Ryan has been part of drama club productions each of his three years, O'Kara was brand new to the stage.

"I've never been in a show before," the 17-year-old senior said. "Previous to this I'd been doing indoor track, but Mr. Sinclair had convinced me to do it."

Seeing her work in the choir, K-12 music supervisor and show director Ray Sinclair encouraged O'Kara to audition. But she had no idea she would land such an important role.

"I might have panicked a little bit," she said with a laugh about reading the cast list. "I'd like to think I grew into the role over time, but at first I didn't know."

She added that the role of Sherrie was challenging because she is so different from O'Kara's real personality.

"I'd say I'm a bit more sarcastic. Sherrie really had this starry-eyed, off-the-bus-from-Kansas thing that I don't have."

While she has experience singing, O'Kara had to learn all about the other aspects of putting on a music production, including acting and dancing.

"I love to sing, so any time I could sing was great," she said. "The hardest part was dancing and learning to be the part since she's so different from me. So basically, everything but the singing."

While "Rock of Ages" was her first foray into the world of musical theater, she is no stranger to music.

She plays the clarinet in the school's band and sings in both the chorus and a capella group and last year was admitted into Tri-M National Music Honor Society.

In addition to her involvement in the school's music department, O'Kara has also been a member of the Student Council for all four of her years at Cromwell High School.

"At first, I did it because my older siblings did," the youngest of seven said. "Since then I've really grown to appreciate helping people."

Of the activities sponsored by the Student Council, the dinners they host for senior citizens at town hall are her favorite.

The National Honor Society student is also an active member of CAYAC, the Cromwell Action Youth Awareness Council, which she joined her junior year.

"We mainly focus on raising awareness on drug safety and Internet safety," she said. "You'd be surprised how many people don't know facts about narcotics or Internet safety. I want to help instill those good behaviors in people younger than me."

In addition to her musical and volunteer efforts, O'Kara is also an athlete on both the volleyball and track teams. She has played volleyball since her freshman year and her favorite part of the game is spiking the ball.

"Other than just loving the sport, I enjoy hitting things," she said with a laugh.

O'Kara mostly competes in throwing activities such as javelin and discus on the track team. Outside of school, she is active with her family in the local Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, often volunteering at a girls' camp.

"We really love service and we try to do as much as possible," she said.

In her free time, O'Kara enjoys reading fantasy novels such as the Harry Potter or Chronicles of Narnia series. She is known among family and friends for her odd sense of humor.

"I really enjoy making terrible



Photo by Allie Rivera

Senior O'Kara Kramer, left, and junior Ryan Adams starred as Sherrie and Drew in Cromwell High School's recent production of "Rock of Ages."

puns," she said. "I mean just really awful, awful puns. I'm my best audience. I crack myself up."

Ryan is no stranger to the stage. The junior also had roles in the school's last two productions, "Beauty and the Beast" and "Anything Goes," as well as performing outside of school in "Tom Sawyer," "The Little Mermaid," "Hairspray" and "Young Frankenstein."

His musical activities don't end on the stage. Also a member of the Tri-M National Music Honor Society, he is dedicated to music. He took up the alto saxophone in the seventh grade and quickly fell in love with the instrument. He already was playing the piano.

"I don't really play the piano as much anymore because I just love playing the sax," he said.

Ryan plays in the school band and is taking an Advanced Placement music theory class, but it is after school when his passion is truly evident. He plays the alto sax in one jazz band and the baritone sax in another, is part of the school's jazz combo and is in the process of helping to form a jazz choir.

"That's the biggest thing I'm getting out of school right now," he said. "I've discovered this newfound passion for music, especially jazz, that Mr. Sinclair introduced to me."

Ryan is dedicated to pursuing that passion right now and has even attended a jazz camp where he discovered a motto that fits his life.

"Music is love and love is every-

thing," he said. "Nothing is better right now."

When not onstage or in a practice room, he enjoys giving back when he can. He attends Bethany Lutheran Church and will sometimes volunteer at its larger events.

Ryan also tries to spend time volunteering with Homeward Bound CT, a Chester-based dog adoption entity.

"We got our dog from that organization, so ever since then I've been trying to give back to them," he said.

In addition to that dog, a Puggle named Moe, Ryan also has two pet guinea pigs named Peter and Snickers.

Music is an Adams family trait. His younger brother Damon, 13, also plays in the band and his father is a member of the Greater Middletown Chorale. Ryan's mother doesn't sing or play an instrument, but he called her an integral part of the family's success.

"She's very supportive. She comes to every single one of our band events for my brother, my dad or me," he said. "She's the best."

With their time in "Rock of Ages" behind them, both O'Kara and Ryan said they have only fond memories of the rehearsals and performance. O'Kara is looking forward to graduating this year and Ryan is already anticipating next year's production.

"The best part is meeting new people and working with them and then getting to those show days," Ryan said. "It's always a really fun time." **CL**

Living

Spring Home & Garden

spaces

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Living Spaces



Effortlessly chic

The absence of color is all the rage in home decorating

White is a versatile color in home decorating and renovation. White helps any space look effortlessly chic, blends well with just about any color and can be incorporated into various design styles — from modern to traditional.

While the color white is always trendy, the paint manufacturers Benjamin Moore chose white (Simply White OC-117) as its “it” color for 2016. White can be used nearly anywhere inside and outside the home. Improving interior and exterior spaces with white elements is easier than you might think, and it instantly can make anything look as good as new.

Kitchen

While rich cherrywood cabinets and deeply hued granite countertops have long been popular in kitchens,

creamy white cabinets paired with blonde wood countertops can work together to make kitchens seem open and airy. If all white is not your thing, brighten up kitchen spaces with white canisters, cookie jars and a fresh bouquet of white flowers to add instant appeal.

Living Room

Use white as a base color for living room spaces so you can build on it with other hues on pillows and draperies, mixing and matching however you see fit.

Homeowners who have children and/or pets should look for furniture with removable slipcovers. This way they're easily removed and laundered.

Bathroom

White bathrooms look fresh and are easy to clean and maintain. White

tiles provide a classic look. Include colored bath mats, towels and shower curtains to break up the white as you see fit. A neutral white base makes it easy to switch out color schemes whenever you feel like it.

Bedroom

Feminine and fresh, white bedrooms may not be the first choice for novice designers. If the prospect of white on white seems too sterile, offset deeper hues on bed linens and walls with white furniture. This provides some pop against the darker contrast. Keep in mind that doing a bed up in all white means it will always be easy to find matching sheets and pillowcases, making it possible to ensure everything looks cohesive and crisp.

Outdoors

Use white paint on trims, shutters,

mailboxes and more to provide that pop of contrast against the rest of the home.

White complements just about every color, making it a versatile choice on a home's accents regardless of the main exterior color of that home.

White and other light shades will reflect the sun as well, contributing to cooler temperatures on walkways, decks and other structures, which can be advantageous to homeowners who live in warm climates.

Is it any wonder that white continues to be a classic and popular color to use around the home?

Whether you do so with monochromatic rooms or accent pieces, you can incorporate white into design plans throughout your home. **CL**

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Seeing green: How to help your lawn bounce back from winter

Lawns are exposed to the elements throughout the year, and each season brings its own unique set of challenges. Summer heat waves can make it hard for lawns to maintain their lush green appeal, while the falling leaves of autumn can threaten root systems if not handled properly. Winter frost and snow also can pose a threat to lawns, leaving homeowners with some work to do when spring arrives.

Spring is a season of revival, and that spirit of rejuvenation extends to lawns. When the last vestiges of winter begin to disappear, homeowners can dust off their gardening gloves and start taking steps to revitalize their lawns for the months ahead.

- Look for signs of damage. Winter can be hard on lawns, so it's important for homeowners to look for signs of damage before they begin planning any springtime landscaping projects. Salt damage can occur in areas that received heavy snowfall over the winter. Many communities use rock salt to de-ice snow- and ice-covered roads, and that rock salt is largely

made up of sodium chloride, which can draw moisture from grass and cause it to brown. Salt trucks used during winter storms often spit salt out onto lawns, so don't be surprised if you notice brown spots on your grass, especially in those areas closest to the road. Winter lawn damage may also be caused by voles, burrowing mouse-like rodents that make paths beneath the snow to hide from predators and feed on grass blades and roots. Lawns with distinctly matted areas may also have been damaged by snow mold that can weaken turf.

- Consult a professional landscaper. Homeowners with considerable experience tending to damaged lawns can no doubt identify and address problems on their own. That's because many problems are a result of the weather, which tends to be similar and produce similar problems from one year to the next. But inexperienced homeowners should consult professional landscapers before attempting to address problems on their own. Winter lawn damage may be caused by a variety of factors that can produce similar symp-

toms, and professional landscapers can identify the culprits behind such damage and provide the most effective solutions to restore the lawn.

- Remove debris. A light raking can help remove any debris that accumulated over the winter. Such debris, which may include fallen branches and fallen leaves left behind from the final days of fall, can prevent lawns from getting the sun and water they need to thrive. Remove this debris, but make sure the grass is not frozen when you do, as walking on frozen grass can cause further damage.

- Let the grass grow. Mowing the lawn is a chore that's reserved for spring, summer and maybe early fall, but it's important that homeowners don't jump the gun and mow too early after winter.

A patient approach allows the grass to reestablish itself, so let it grow a little higher than you normally would before the first cut. When the grass is roughly 4.5 inches high, you can cut it down to three inches and then maintain your normal mowing routine throughout the rest of spring and summer. **CL**

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Living Spaces

Picking favorites

Gardeners share special tools

by Mara Dresner
Staff Writer

Anyone who likes to garden knows that you need some basic tools just to get started.

However, Sarah Bailey of UConn Extension in West Hartford said you don't need a shed full of implements to be successful.

"I can do a substantial amount of my routine gardening tasks with two tools: a trowel and my pruners. I have a variety of trowels in convenient locations, but one pair of pruners travels with me everywhere. I have holes in the back pocket of most of my pants and shorts where the pruners have worn

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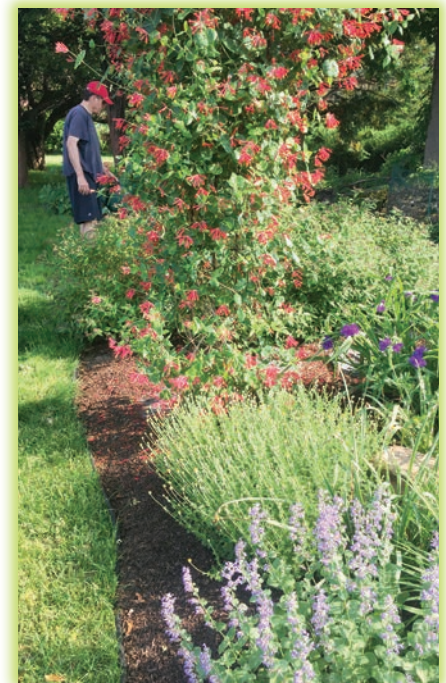
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Living Spaces



Brenda Sullivan of Thompson Street Farm in Glastonbury is attached to this masonry trowel, which has been passed down through the generations. Right: Cheryl DePrest, founder of the Olga Bobbi line of skincare, jokes that her husband, Channel 3 Chief Meteorologist Bruce DePrest (pictured), is her favorite to work with in the garden. The two have an extensive organic garden.



through," she said.

Bailey, who serves as state extension master gardener coordinator, Hartford County Master gardener coordinator and youth gardening coordinator, finds many

uses for the pruners.

"I use them for cutting twine, trimming small branches and non-woody plant material, snipping off diseased or pest-infested plant tips, and plenty of mundane tasks such as

opening plastic packaging of plant ties or hose parts. They are a critical element of hose repair, which seems to be an ongoing process," she said.

"There are plenty of very good pruners available, but my longtime

partner is a pair of Felco #7 pruners. Along with a well-balanced design that puts your wrist at a comfortable angle, they have a rotating bottom handle that allows you to easily change your grip. When you are

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Sarah Bailey of UConn Extension in West Hartford, said you don't need a shed full of implements to be successful. "I can do a substantial amount of my routine gardening tasks with two tools: a trowel and my pruners. I have a variety of trowels in convenient locations, but one pair of pruners travels with me everywhere.

doing a lot of pruning at one time, this makes all the difference in how your hand feels at the end of the day. The other great feature is the replaceable blades, especially given the amount of abuse I subject them to. The #7 is a large pair of pruners. I've heard folks with smaller hands complain that they are uncomfortable, but that is the only negative comment I've heard. They are not cheap, but they last forever. I have had my pair for over 20 years and they're still going strong."

The feel of a tool is important even for someone who grows plants professionally, such as Brenda Sullivan of Thompson Street Farm in Glastonbury.

"Hand garden tools can take on a personal attachment for gardeners with their size, weight and handle type being key individual factors. Even a veteran gardener like myself can become frustrated with an excessively heavy, bulky or otherwise inefficient tool," she noted. "Sometimes a gardener must think outside the box and adapt a tool

from someplace else as I did with my most prized garden tool: an old masonry trowel.

"This beautiful tool from the early part of the 20th century was left to me by Uncle Larry who inherited it from his father after he died in the 1930s. To my surprise, the worn handle from decades of use is the perfect size for my hand, and the trowel is well-balanced and not too heavy even after hours of use. This is important because during the growing season, I prepare 50-plus micro-

green trays a week so the use of a heavy hand tool fatigues my hand and wrist," she continued. "I also love this trowel for its tapered end that fits perfectly in the corners of the tray allowing for even soil distribution as well as for its efficiency as a transplanting tool in the garden."

Cheryl DePrest of Wethersfield, founder of Olga Bobbi skincare products, also has a favorite in her garden. In her case, however, her favorite is a "who" and not a "what": her husband Bruce DePrest, chief meteorologist at Channel 3.

"Bruce and I love to garden and this is a project that we enjoy together. We have a perennial garden and an organic herb/vegetable garden every year. Our herb garden is always the same. Parsley, basil, sage, thyme, oregano, tarragon, lemon verbena and rosemary are a must," Cheryl DePrest said. "This year our vegetable garden will consist of many varieties of green beans; a variety of peppers, including habanero, Bruce's favorite; cucumbers; and several kinds of cherry tomatoes – we like them sweet."

They grow everything organically, and Cheryl uses the lemon verbena, rosemary and cucumbers in soaps for her Olga Bobbi line.

"Bruce loves making his yummy marinara sauce with fresh basil and oregano," Cheryl shared. "Last year we had so much basil that I was able to make 10 batches of pesto, some of which we froze for the winter. This is a family favorite." **CL**

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Living Spaces

How to transform a fixer-upper

Investing in a fixer-upper requires a leap of faith and a vision of what the home can look like in the future. Turning a real estate lemon into lemonade requires certain skills and a good measure of patience.

The real estate market will always have its ups and downs, but real estate is an oft-profitable investment. Real estate investors do their investing for various reasons.

Some see a house as a place to hang their hats for years and years, while others look at properties as nothing more than investments.

Buying a home with the intent to fix it up and resell it is called a “fix and flip.”

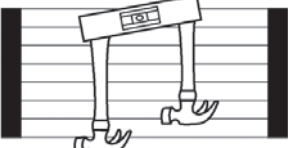
In such situations, investors buy homes at below-market prices before refurbishing the homes with the goal of recouping their initial investment and then some when the homes are ultimately put back on the market.

Flipping has become popular for

both expert remodelers and novice investors. RealtyTrac, the nation's leading source for comprehensive housing data, noted in its “Year-End and Q4 2015 U.S. Home Flipping” report that 5.5 percent of all single-family home and condo sales during the year were flipped properties. This marked an increase from the same time the previous year.

Investing in a fixer-upper requires a leap of faith and a vision of what the home can look like in the future. Turning a real estate lemon into lemonade requires certain skills and a good measure of patience. The following are some guidelines to get anyone started.

- Don't bite off more than you can chew. Make an honest assessment of



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Renovate with an eye toward prospective buyers' needs. Keep things neutral and accommodating. Research the latest trends to understand what buyers might be seeking in a home.

your abilities and which renovations, if any, you can handle. If you are unskilled or inexperienced working with your hands, then it can be easy for an investment property to quickly become a money pit. Before purchasing a property, hire a trained home inspector to tour the home with you and point out all of the areas that will need renovation. With this list, begin getting estimates on how much money the work will entail. Determine if this fits with your budget or not. You do not want to invest so much that it exceeds what you could feasibly recoup when it comes time to sell.

- **Overlook cosmetic things when visiting properties.** Cosmetic issues include all of the easily replaceable

items in a home, such as carpeting, appliances, interior paint colors and cabinetry. Focus on the bones of the house — the architectural integrity and those little touches that you envision having a “wow” factor.

- **Seek the help of experts.** Some flippers think they'll save the most money by doing all of the work themselves. This isn't always the case. Professional architects, designers and contractors may help you save money. Contractors have an intimate knowledge of where to buy materials and may be able to negotiate prices based on wholesale or trade costs. In addition, experts can help you avoid common pitfalls because they've already done this type of work time and again. It's



in some instances, a coat of paint and some new accents may be all you need to transform a space. For example, if kitchen cabinets are in good condition, see if they can be refaced or painted instead of replaced entirely.

smart to rely on expert advice, even if it means investing a little bit more.

- **Save money by doing some work yourself.** While the pros may tackle the more complex parts of a given project, such as rewiring electricity or changing the footprint of a home, you can still be involved.

Ask to participate in demolition, such as taking down walls or removing old materials from the home. Such participation may be fun, and it can save you substantial amounts of money on labor.

- **Recognize that not everything must be completely redone.** Realize that, in some instances, a coat of paint and some new accents may be all you need to transform a space. For example, if kitchen cabinets are in good

condition, see if they can be refaced or painted instead of replaced entirely. Install new door pulls/handles to add visual interest. Look for some ready-made items, such as bookshelves, instead of installing custom carpentry.

- **Think about what the buyer wants and not what you want.** Renovate with an eye toward prospective buyers' needs. Keep things neutral and accommodating. Research the latest trends to understand what buyers might be seeking in a home.

You want potential buyers to envision themselves moving right in.

Renovating a fixer-upper takes time, but it can be a worthwhile project, and one that can help anyone turn a profit in a booming real estate market. **CL**

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Editorial

Another unpleasant budget season arrives

Some year, towns will be able to enjoy a budget cycle when money is sufficient, new initiatives can be launched and the mill rate can be reduced to make the lives of taxpayers less stressful. But not this year.

Just when it looked like Connecticut might be coming out of a decade-long recession, the bottom fell out of the state budget. Legislators are struggling to find ways to stop the red ink from washing over the budget like a tsunami, already more than \$1 billion in deficit.

One of the problems with this scenario is that it trickles down in a mighty way to cities and towns. Municipalities depend upon state financial assistance to balance their own budgets and keep local taxes under control. Many get 15 percent of more of their total annual budget from the state.

That number is likely to be much less this year. The legislature needs to trim everywhere it can and it also has to deal with making sure that Hartford, which is in dire financial straits, does not go belly up. This does not bode well for most towns.

As any homeowner knows, it costs more each year just to live the same life and pay for the same goods and services. Prices for everything from food to electricity to gasoline to countless other needs rise on an annual basis.

The same is true for municipalities. Maintaining the status quo still costs more money than it did the previous year and usually results in a tax increase of 1 or 2 percent. Much

of that is driven by labor costs, but people are an integral part of government and public education.

The real problem is the heavy dependence on the property tax to fund local government. Most other states don't allow this one tax to bear so much of the fiscal burden.

When he conducted his traveling road show seeking input and support from the suburbs, Hartford Mayor Luke Bronin suggested that state government take a small percentage of its sales tax revenue and designate that for municipal aid. That's a good idea.

Of course, this makes the task of balancing the state budget more difficult. So the likelihood of his suggestion being adopted is weak.

Bronin and many other mayors and first selectmen have also called for maintaining, or even increasing, state aid, especially the PILOT program that provides partial payment for otherwise tax-exempt state buildings, hospitals, colleges and more.

That's another reasonable solution but it's also not likely to happen because of the state's money problems.

Add to all this the fact that almost every city and town in Connecticut has a charter that requires it to adopt a budget weeks, if not months, before the state does the same.

So, when it comes to how much state aid they want to factor into their plans, all they can do is guess. **CL**

next way to fund another shortfall with our hard-earned money? We need to control state spending and look at why industry is moving out of the state and taking with it their tax revenue.

When companies leave, they also take their tax-paying employees with them. This state has a serious brain drain going on and in no way do I see this proposal addressing that very critical issue.

Sorry, Tony Guerrero, you will get zero support for those tolls from this taxpayer. Connecticut citizens need Connecticut government to do its job and fix what it has caused. We shouldn't have to pay for your mistakes.

Carrie Christie

Letter

Opposes highway tolls

To the Editor:

I'm afraid the state representative [Antonio Guerrero of Rocky Hill] is representing the state, not its citizens. The state was in the red before Lotto, then again before the casinos, and now we are nearing bankruptcy.

So ask yourselves why is the highest taxed state (collectively) unable to stop the bleeding? Clearly, the state has mismanaged finances and likely, even with this toll revenue primarily coming from Connecticut residents' pockets, it's just another Band-Aid the state will quickly blow through.

How long until the state is looking for the

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KEITH TURLEY, Publisher

EDITORIAL

Abigail Albair, Executive Editor

aalbair@turleyct.com

Mark Jahne, Editor

John Fitts, Assistant Editor

Alicia B. Smith, Associate Editor

STAFF WRITERS

Allie Rivera, **Mara Dresner**,
David Heuschkel, **Sloan Brewster**

ADVERTISING SALES

Alana DiMarco

alana@turleyct.com,
860-264-5723

PAGE DESIGNERS

Daniel Kornegay, **Cynthia Martel**,
Robert Sirois

GRAPHICS DEPARTMENT

Barbara Ouellette, Production Manager

ads@turleyct.com, 860-264-5523

Maureen LaBier, Production Assistant

Daniel Kornegay, **Corley Fleming**, **Cynthia Martel**,
Kathy Kokoszka, **Mary Grimes**

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BY MARK DIXON
WFSB METEOROLOGIST [AMS]



A Warm, Snowy winter...

Meteorological Winter is defined as the months of December, January and February. For the Greater Hartford Area, records have been kept since 1905 and are currently maintained at Bradley International Airport in Windsor Locks. So how did this winter compare to others?

The average temperature for the season was 33.0° ... that's 3.9° above normal and makes this past winter, 2016-17, the 10th warmest! This is just one year after the 2nd warmest winter (in 2015-16, the average temperature was 35.1°—just 0.1° away from the record warmest, the winter of 2001-02). Last winter, records were also set for the number of 50° and 60° days.

At Bridgeport (another official recording station in Connecticut), January went down as the warmest on record at 6.8° above normal. It was then followed by one of the warmest Februarys, the 28 days averaged 6.0° above normal.

During the course of the season, Windsor Locks had 8.71" of precipitation (rain, plus the water equivalent of snow, sleet and ice),

this was 0.85" below average. Total snowfall was 41.2", an impressive 10.5" above average (a daily snowfall record was set on February 9th, with Blizzard Chris – 15.5" was received, breaking the prior record of 13.0" from 1969).

When making comparisons to 'normal' ... a 30-year span of time from 1981 to 2010 is used. **CL**



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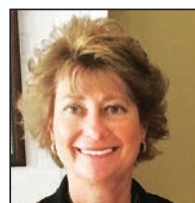
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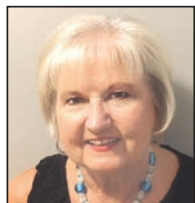
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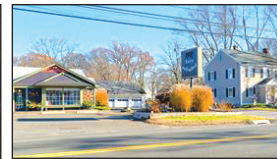
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CONDOMINIUM - ROCKY HILL \$184,900
Attractive 3BR, 3BA condo. Picturesque setting. 2 master suites! Gas heat. C/Air. 1 car garage. 1st floor laundry. **JEFF COLEMAN**



PORTLAND \$235,000
Looking for one flr living? Spacious, bright 3BR, 1.5BA ranch w/laundry on 1st flr, 1 car garage & C/Air. **CHERYL ZALEWSKI**



CROMWELL \$224,900
3BR, 2BA Colonial. LR w/FP, DR. Kitchen w/ stainless, gas stove. Hrdwd. Peerless boiler, pool. Garage! Gas available. **JEFF COLEMAN**



LAND
CROMWELL \$64,900 EACH
3 building lots. Main St & South St. For homes 1,700-2,100 sq ft. 3 BRs, 2 BA. Alternate plans need P&Z approval. **JEFF COLEMAN**



PORTLAND \$129,900
Very nice half acre located in the Highland area on High St. Walk to school. City water/sewer available. **GARY GAROFALO**



Gary Garofalo
860-604-6745



Cheryl Zalewski
860-930-9506



Nate Miller
860-993-3577



Teresa Pytlík
860-418-9529



Elizabeth Riley
860-301-6359



John Milardo
860-770-2261

425 Main Street • Cromwell • 860.635.8801
hagelrealty.com • main@hagelrealty.com